BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08653 242 9
4019

Accessions
(2431)

Shelf No.
*757 8.60

FOUNDED 1852
SIMUL PATRIBUS SIT DEUS NOBIS
BOSTONIA
CONDITA A.D.
1630.
CIVITATI REGIMINE DONATA A.D. 1822.
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Received Feb. 26, 1891.

REPORT

FROM THE

Ladies' Relief Agency.

1874.

To make slips for

REPORT

FROM THE

LADIES' RELIEF AGENCY.

BOSTON:
PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN & SON.
1874.

BM.
(243.12)
Feb. 26, 1891.

REPORT.

In 1861, under the direction of Rev. Dr. Mason, I began to visit a few of the families of his beneficiaries, to learn more directly their needs, and so commenced the work that is now one of the charities of the city. Before Dr. Mason's death, his private purse supplied the funds that carried aid to many poor homes; and after his death, his sister, his daughters, and certain members of his Church, furnished the means, and gave their personal interest and care to continue and enlarge his plans.

It was in the summer of 1865, while the death of Abraham Lincoln still cast its shadow over our land, that I first entered upon the work of visiting among the poor in certain sections of our city. In the years that have passed since then I have seen all phases of want and suffering represented; seen the refined and educated reduced by misfortune or injustice, from affluence

to poverty. The deserted wife, with her wrongs and her destitution ; the widow gladly accepting any work, however hard or poorly paid, to save from want or sin her helpless children ; and, worse than these, the wretchedness of the drunkard's family ; the profligate and his victims, many of these women who have lost character and hope, too old to be subjects for the refuge or asylum ; and the crippled in heart and mind and body, of all nationalities ; till the almost despairing cry has gone up, 'When will Satan's work cease, when will the curse be lifted, and our earth, purified and regenerated, shine in the light and love of God?'

Still, it is with feelings of deep thankfulness that we call to mind many families on the verge of starvation, hopeless and wretched, to whom, in regard to thoughts of the future, hope and assurance have taken the place of anxiety and despair. To how many our Lord's pitying heart has turned with the cry, "Who touched Me?" we cannot tell ; but that virtue has gone out of Him into some like these, is seen in their changed lives to-day.

A hurried sketch of some incidents by the way, and the thoughts they suggested, may not be amiss. In my first visits, were included fifty families of colored people ; of these, fifteen were taught to read. One of the women, finding it

difficult to retain what she learned at each lesson, always rose in the night to repeat it over and over again, as she "could remember it better that way." In the homes of these people I often met others, and, yielding to their importunities to visit them, my circle of duties widened.

By one of these, I was led to the room of an old man, confined to his bed by chronic rheumatism ; his wife and family were dead or at a distance ; he had been for thirty years a slave to a cruel master. When I first saw him, lonely, sick, and destitute, his heart seemed full of love to the Saviour and of gratitude that he was a free man ; though life must have been a burden, heaven was in prospect, and already he seemed, through faith and patience, to inherit the promise.

One woman, a great sufferer from rheumatism, was also blind, and my hour of reading to her was the one bright spot in her darkened, suffering life. Each of these families was visited once a week, more often in cases of sickness.

I sometimes met with those who had known the two extremes of life, in its affluence and its poverty. Such a family I found in one miserable room, dark and damp, in Castle Street ; there were father, mother, and six children ; the father, the son of an English gentleman, who for many years was the English consul in Italy. The former, even in his low estate, proved himself a

travelled and highly educated man. Revolutionary troubles, three years' litigation to recover property, and failure in trade, induced him to leave home; he came to this city a discouraged and beggared man. Disease ignorantly treated, left him a helpless invalid; cold, privation, and neglect, made his wife a rheumatic cripple; yet each retained the manners and polish of their birthright. The eldest child, a boy of fifteen years; earned $4.00 per week, of which $3.00 went for rent; a younger brother, as errand boy, received $1.50: thus the sum of $2.50 was made to clothe, feed, and warm eight persons. This case required the removal of the family to a healthy and cleanly location; medical care, that might restore the father sufficiently to be helpful to his family; and clothing for the children: these were procured, to some extent, with very encouraging results.

I found hundreds of such cases; persons diseased, unable to work, some utterly without means of support; how they lived was a mystery. A shelter for a few weeks is procured, and when all that can be earned or begged fails to pay the rent, another is sought. By such uncertain tenure do thousands in this city hold their homes. There is a prejudice even among benevolent people, against contributing money to pay "rent;" but it is often the case that there is

no other way in which the same amount can be used so much to the relief of a family. If capitalists would build comfortable tenements, or make cleanly and healthy such as there are, and bring them within the means of the poorest, the work would be half done. How can a man, breathing fetid air, living in the squalor and debasement that abound, where the poor most do congregate and often of necessity, feel hope or courage to rise above his condition ?

There is an assimilating power in evil ; let alone, the evil spreads until it is a question whether we have the power to put a limit to its bounds, much more to work a cure. The wonder is not that demoralization exists to such a fearful extent, but that there should be found here and there any who endeavor to preserve the decencies of life.

There seems but one remedy for the evil :—to tear down the rookeries in which the greater number of these people live, and let there be proper supervision, under the authority of law, for the construction of whatever buildings may be erected in future. But supposing this were ever done, it is too long to wait ; now, while they are starving and helpless, and till the good time comes, they must have aid.

My visits to these people were continued daily, each day bringing new cases to my knowledge,

until the work so increased that a room in the city building was granted through the influence of the ladies whose interest and means had aided and carried on the work from the first. This was in February, 1869, four of the ladies, Mrs. G. H. Shaw, Mrs. R. M. Cushing, Mrs. T. Lyman, Miss L. Shaw, giving a certain sum monthly for distribution, many others making handsome and frequent donations. Since the occupation of this room, not a day has passed without numerous calls for aid. Ladies interested in the work, as well as those whose help sustains it, send each applicant for charity. This does not set aside the visiting, as each case, if not before known to our patrons, is investigated, and a report made for their acceptance or approval.

Through the winter, from October to May, work is taken from the Boston Sewing Society and given out to women with families ; and through the summer, when, by the absence of many families, all supplies save the stated monthly subscriptions are stopped, material is purchased and work given to many who depend upon it as their only support. These summer months are the most trying of the year, for the supply never meets the demand, and but for contributions in money from the few ladies who never grow weary with the call upon them, much suffering would be unrelieved. Miss Mason, Mrs. Thayer, Derby, Parker and Porter, never fail

to give supplies of needed garments, or money or stores.

Visiting among the poor, a personal acquaintance with and knowledge of their needs, can alone prevent the evils growing out of the indiscriminate method of many in bestowing charity. One of these evils is to create a large class of impostors. It was said by one who has given the greater part of his life to labor among the poor of New York, that his conviction after all his years of observation was, that four-fifths of the ordinary applicants for assistance should not be aided, while that most of them should be in the work-house. To one such family, receiving frequent assistance out of pity for the five helpless children all under seven years of age, the youngest twins, we should refuse farther aid ; the father, though he has suffered the loss of one arm, could easily earn $10 or $12 per week if he would keep sober, but though good situations have many times been found for him, he has as often lost them by his indulgence in drink. His wife is temperate, but without the faculty to make home comfortable, though she works hard when she can obtain work. The children are diseased, with appetites always unsatisfied, and greatly need nourishing food. Clothing, food, and money to pay rent, have been freely given, but have failed to change old habits or arouse ambition. Effort was made to send this

family to the work-house, and also to find there a home for a poor woman who spent much of her time in wandering about with a baby in her arms, begging for a day's work; she is weak in mind, made so by her husband's abusive treatment, and being careless and awkward, no one would employ her.

One part of the work, more especially in cases like these, is to seek to save the children; and many children, abandoned by their parents, or given up by parents seemingly lost to all good and all hope for themselves, yet with animal instincts caring for their young, have been provided with a home, or been placed in some Christian institution where homes are found for such children. It is seldom, however, that we find a mother willing to give up her child, and this seems to be the experience of others. In a recent convention in New York of those interested in juvenile reform, the fact was shown that a much larger proportion of the inmates of penal institutions for the young, were the children of widows; and the explanation given was, that fathers left with the care of motherless little ones, will more easily conform to circumstances and resign their children to families and institutions that will provide for them than mothers will; these, left with fatherless children, will cling to them amid want and attendant temptations, too often until virtue and

honesty are lost in the painful struggle for a subsistence.

We sometimes find in the lowest walks of life, here and there, persons so imbued with the spirit of Christ, that in the deepest poverty they give, while they abound in the riches of His grace.

In the basement of a house in Nashua street, I found an English woman more than eighty years of age, living upon a small pension that barely paid her rent. I learned that for a long time she had been in the habit of attracting the street children in her vicinity to her room, by little gifts of candy, corn-balls and the like, inducing each child before it left her to read a chapter in the Bible, or a few verses, if many were present, and then talking with them of what was read ; older people were often drawn in to these readings, and a marked change, I was told, had taken place in the neighborhood. To enable her more extensively to carry on the good work in which she was engaged, and in view of her increasing infirmities disabling her from active labor for a livelihood, a certain sum was promised monthly toward her rent.

The following is one of the most interesting instances that I now recall in those early days of my visiting, illustrative of the singular patience and power of endurance that we often find in the children of the poor. Is it stoicism or is it something God-given ?

The case to which I refer was that of a little boy whom I found in a cellar where his family lived. The father was a drunkard, the mother's cares had been recently increased by the addition to her family of an infant, her fifth child. The eldest was seven years old ; two of the babies were twins, one of them unnaturally quiet, sitting through the long day, and irritable if moved. It was less trouble to let him alone, and so he was left to develope hip disease, as was afterwards found. A home was provided for him in the Samaritan Hospital. Visiting him after he was removed there, I was struck by his loving, grateful looks and acts, which I shall never forget. He "never saw such a bright place," he said. Poor child, he had never seen the sunshine. Every body loved the patient little sufferer. After three years, the cure seeming permanent, he was returned to his parents ; but the unwholesome influences of his home soon told upon him, he pined away, then abscesses formed on his side, that increased in size and number till the little fellow could only rest on his hands and knees. For months confined to his bed, worn to a shadow, but beautiful in suffering, he waited patiently the summons to his rest.

The extreme heat of the summer, sending almost all our patrons from the city, together with the closing of so many offices where our

poor people have obtained the work that gave them their daily bread, caused much suffering at the time, and the effect of the stagnation is still felt. Nothing could be laid by in many cases to meet the needs of the coming winter. All the sewing that could be obtained, was given out and liberally paid for, but it scarcely met the rent or furnished the scanty meals.

The only pleasant memory of the season, that seemed, as the days went on, like some oppressive night-mare, was the excursion enjoyed by so large a number of our poor,—*that one day*, when they had enough to eat and nothing to pay, when they could see, instead of our narrow streets and the narrow belt of sky above them, the whole outspread heavens and our fair earth's green carpet and trees, and the blue waters. Perhaps, in the hearts of some of those children, a love of the country has been implanted that may yet draw them from the city slums ; for it is a singular fact that the poor do prefer herding together, though seemingly destitute of all the comforts of life, to accepting the proffer of homes and maintenance, with *work*, in our country towns.

The liberality of a few ladies interested in our work, enabled some of our beneficiaries to spend a few weeks in the country. The case of one poor widow greatly interested me ; she was a laundress, and was dying of consumption, brought

on by overwork in supporting an aged, helpless mother, and two children. Five of the family died of consumption in a hospital, and when it was proposed to her to go to one, she begged to be let alone to die as she was, yet expressing a longing to see once more her old home, and to look, once again, out upon the sea. The memory of its cool breezes, as they used to come to her on the beach where she had so often rambled in the old days, haunted her ; some friends, too, of those days were left, and she would say good-bye to them. By the kindness of one of the ladies of Trinity Church, this wish was gratified. Hearing that she had returned, I called upon her. It was pleasant to hear her grateful acknowledgment of the pleasure received ; she was perfectly content and happy,—her heart's desire had been given her, and she had nothing more to ask. She is only waiting till the Master calls.

And thus we close our record, thankful that something has been done to remove or alleviate the heavy burden of sin and misery each passing day has revealed, and praying for the speedy advent of that time when Satan shall be bound, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ,—when our ransomed, regenerated earth shall rejoice in its salvation.

C. HARMON, Secretary.

TREASURER'S REPORT.

Money received and expended from January 1st, 1872, to January 1st, 1873:

Received	$4,464 50
Expended	4,393 57
In hand	$70 93

DONATIONS RECEIVED.

JANUARY.

Fruit, from	Miss Mason.
A bundle of Garments,	Mrs. Wilson.
Toys and Flannel Night-gowns,	Mrs. Paine.
Two large parcels Garments,	Miss Morrill.
Hats,	Mrs. Burnham.
Grapes,	Miss Mason.
Forty-eight Garments,	Boston Sewing Circle.

FEBRUARY.

Flannels and Dresses,	Miss Morrill.
Five Garments,	Miss Robbins.
Eighty-eight Garments,	Boston Sewing Circle.
Tea,	Messrs. Peters & Chase.

MARCH.

Garments, from	Mrs. Derby.
Thirty-five Garments,	Boston Sewing Circle.
Potatoes,	Miss Hunt.
Infants' Dresses,	Mrs. S. V. R. Thayer.
Infants' Dresses,	Mrs. Cushing.
Garments, from	Industrial Society of Trinity.

APRIL.

Forty-six Garments, from . . . Boston Sewing Circle.
Box of Cologne, ... Miss Mason.
Parcel, ... Mrs. N. Thayer.
Box of Oranges, ... Mr. Morrill.

MAY.

One hundred and ninety-five Garments, Boston Sewing Circle.
One hundred and sixty-seven Garments for Sewing.

JUNE.

Cast-off Garments, from . . . . Mrs. K. D. Smith.
Clothing from friends in . . . . New York.
Garments, ... Miss E. Mason.
Cologne, Ginger and Bark, . . . Miss Mason.
Three Quiet Helpers for the Sick, . . Miss Mason.
Tea, ... Messrs. Peters & Chase.

AUGUST.

A large bundle of Clothing, from . . Mrs. Dr. Wilson.

SEPTEMBER.

Three barrels of Apples, from . . . . Mr. Durant.
Coat, ... Miss Hunt.
Barrel of Potatoes, ... Miss Robbins.
Garments, ... Mrs. Burr Porter.

OCTOBER.

Two large bundles of Clothing, from Mr. and Misses Morrill.

NOVEMBER.

Garments, from . . . . . Mrs. B. Porter.
Cotton, Print & Flannel, for sewing material, Mrs. A. T. Coolidge.
Barrel of Vegetables, ... Mrs. Chase.
Basket of Grapes, ... Miss Mason.

DECEMBER.

Bundle of Clothing, from . . . . Mrs. J. Lawrence.
Five Tons of Coal, ... Mr. H. F. Durant.
Three valuable parcels of Clothing, . . . Mrs. Burnham.
Flannel Garments, ... Miss E. Mason.
Bundle of Clothing, ... Mrs. J. C. D. Parker.
Tea, ... Messrs. Peters & Chase.

(Mar., 1890, 20,000)

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

One volume allowed at a time, and obtained only by card; to be kept 14 days (or seven days in the case of fiction and juvenile books published within one year) without fine; not to be renewed; to be reclaimed by messenger after 21

(Mar., 1890, 20,000)

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

One volume allowed at a time, and obtained only by card; to be kept 14 days (or seven days in the case of fiction and juvenile books published within one year) without fine; not to be renewed; to be reclaimed by messenger after 21 days, who will collect 20 cents besides fine of 2 cents a day, including Sundays and holidays; not to be lent out of the borrower's household, and not to be transferred; to be returned at this Hall.

Borrowers finding this book mutilated or unwarrantably defaced, are expected to report it; and also any undue delay in the delivery of books.

***No claim can be established because of the failure of any notice, to or from the Library, through the mail.

The record below must not be made or altered by borrower.